

## Press Release

**Strict embargo until: 00.01 9 November 2012**

### **NHS fails to communicate effectively with patients and families, warns Ombudsman**

A significant rise in the number of complaints where the NHS has failed to provide an adequate remedy or proper apology when things have gone wrong is highlighted in a new report published by the Health Service Ombudsman today (9 November 2012). In one case seen by the Ombudsman, a bereaved daughter was told, *'Death is rarely an ideal situation for anyone'* and that *'Truth be told your mother probably said her goodbyes long before the final moments'*.

The report, *Listening and learning*, which gives an overview of NHS complaints made to the Ombudsman in 2011-12, includes other real-life examples of responses given to people who have complained about the NHS. The Health Service Ombudsman, a free and independent service for anyone who is unhappy with NHS services, is calling on the NHS to improve the way it deals with complaints on the ground.

Ombudsman, Julie Mellor said:

*'All too often the people who come to us for help are unhappy because of the careless communication, insincere apologies and unclear explanations they've received from the NHS. A poor response to a complaint can add to the problems of someone who is unwell, struggling to take care of others or grieving. The NHS needs to get better at listening to patients and their families and responding to their concerns.'*

The Ombudsman's report also highlights a continuing problem with GPs unfairly or hastily striking off patients from their practice lists after disputes and disagreements. Despite issuing a warning about this a year ago, the Ombudsman has seen complaints of this kind increase by 16 per cent.

Julie Mellor said:

*'Our casework tells us there needs to be a clear shift in the attitude and practice of some GPs towards complaints. Our concerns about how GPs are handling complaints about their practices need to be addressed as a priority.'*

*As the new NHS begins to take shape, GPs and other providers, GP-led Clinical Commissioning Groups and the NHS Commissioning Board will need to work to embed good complaint handling across the NHS.'*

The report features the stories of some of the people who used the Ombudsman's service because they were left dissatisfied with how the NHS had dealt with their original complaint. These include:

- A man who was accused by a surgeon of being a 'baby' when he expressed his anxiety about having a general anaesthetic.
- A couple who were left footing the bill for care home fees for months while waiting for a PCT to reassess the husband's eligibility for NHS funding, even though a different PCT had already assessed him as eligible.
- A man whose skin cancer was misdiagnosed by his GP practice on six different occasions but was unable to get the practice to acknowledge all their failings when he complained.

Statistical information about every NHS organisation across England is also included in the report.

## Ends

## Notes to Editors

1. The Ombudsman has received 50% more complaints about the NHS not acknowledging mistakes in care and 42% more complaints about inadequate remedies being offered, including inadequate apologies.
2. The Health Service Ombudsman's report will be available to download from [www.ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk) on Friday 9 November at 00:01
3. The Health Service Ombudsman is the next step for anyone who is unhappy with how their complaint about the NHS in England has been dealt with. It is a free service, completely independent of the NHS. For further information or advice, contact the Health Service Ombudsman's helpline: 0345 015 4033, email [phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk).
4. For media enquiries about the report or to request an interview, contact the Health Service Ombudsman's Press Office: 0300 061 4996/4272 or email [press@ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:press@ombudsman.org.uk).

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